

An Interview with

Betty Clarkson

April 5, 1979

Interviewed by

Kris Kellogg

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

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## Part 1

CLARKSON: My name is Betty Clarkson. I graduated from Millsaps College and majored in Sociology. I went back to school and got my degree in education. At the time of desegregation, I was teaching fourth grade at Casey Elementary School. When we found out that the school would be desegregated immediately, for some reason, the children were dismissed. And we teachers were left at the school and our job was to clean out our desks and get our rooms in order, and the school board, or whoever, had decided that the way they would decide which teachers went to black schools and which teachers stayed at white schools, they were going to draw, so it was called the lottery.

We had very little to do. We had gotten our desks cleaned out and much of the time was spent in the teacher's lounge talking. And due to the fact that I majored in Sociology, I suppose is the main reason I felt that this was the fair thing to do, you know, desegregation should happen, and [inaudible]. So, we had a good many discussions and arguments, and that kind of thing. And our – if you were to be sent to another school, you would get the information in the mail. And I had decided by the time the letters were due to be sent out that it would be a lot better for me if I were sent to a private school, because a lot of the teachers were very – extremely apprehensive and did not want [inaudible]. And . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Yeah, it was personal feelings that they had, and it was – this was in Mississippi [inaudible], and I want to make it clear to you that I did not feel like this was the way it should have been done. I felt . . .

KELLOGG: How do you feel it should have been done?

CLARKSON: Very slowly. I feel that if they had started in first grade, you know, perhaps desegregated the first grade and desegregated so that you could accept it. You know, even though we had been told years ago that it was going to happen and even though we had had Freedom of Choice, very few people [inaudible]. So, really we were not in any way prepared. [inaudible]. Well, I wrote to the Supreme Court and – and gave my views, which were that it should happen and it should be. But, that what was good for the Whites in Mississippi was good for the Blacks, and vice versa. And I saw this happening as something that the white people would not accept, and we don't have the white people back in the schools yet, you know, that we need, and I think that if it had been done more slowly?.

And another thing that I disagreed with very much is that at Casey School, the Whites that are there are upper-middle class, or upper-class. OK, now what Blacks did they pick to be sent there? Blacks from the poverty area.

And if they wanted integration, you know, if they wanted integration to work, then why didn't somebody take time enough to get upper-class Blacks over there? Because see, it wouldn't matter whether these children from this poverty area were black or white. They just – they don't have anything in common. It didn't make any difference. So, I just think for it to have worked, care could have gone into it – people who really cared. And it just could happen more slowly.

KELLOGG: Well, it could've been that [inaudible] to desegregate right away, they may not have had time. They may have wanted to...

CLARKSON: Oh, there was no time. When I'm saying "they," I mean [inaudible] the Supreme Court or whatever.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: You know. And I certainly don't understand the whole thing, and I'm sure that it's such a complicated thing, I don't know how it could've been done differently, but I do feel like that integration could have been a much more successful thing in Jackson, which is all I can speak for. You know, had it been done in a more thoughtful way. Okay.

Alright, my name was drawn and I was assigned to the Smith School, which is an all-black school, and [inaudible] Powell School. You know where that is?

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: I don't know really how to tell you, but it's off Northside Drive, . . .

KELLOGG: Yeah, okay.

CLARKSON: [inaudible]. It's an all-black [inaudible] school. And one of the teachers who [inaudible] was sent there also. And she went a couple of days, then she quit.

KELLOGG: Did you know why she quit?

CLARKSON: Well, not really. She didn't want to go anyway.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: And she didn't feel good about going. And when I went, as I say, we had been told to clean out our drawers and get everything in order. And when I got to my room, I found papers in there from 1948, which is the year before I had gotten there. I had a group of children whose Stanine's were one.

KELLOGG: Stanine's?

CLARKSON: The best is 10. The least – the next best is nine. The middle is five. The one is the lowest, okay?

KELLOGG: Um, hmm. I'm trying to [inaudible].

CLARKSON: Grade level is five. You're not familiar with that kind of testing?

KELLOGG: No, I'm not.

CLARKSON: Well, just say that it was one percent of the nation. That would do it.

KELLOGG: Oh, okay.

CLARKSON: Okay. Now, I didn't know that these children had been grouped. We didn't do that at Casey, and I think that all of the children in the fourth grade out there were on a Stanine of one. You know, in the one percent of the nation. I found out that some of the other teachers had higher groups that did much better. Now, there was some changing of black students when this happened. So, I got [inaudible] and they happened to be pretty bright students. So, what I ended up with was about four pretty bright students and 30 on a Stanine of one. And one of the little black children was from North Carolina. Her father was in the army. And she was literally as out of place as I was. Interestingly enough, they were – the children were really – gave her a pretty hard time.

Now I had thought when I got there – my attitude was really good – I thought it should happen and I had a lot farther to go. So, it was not anything that was [inaudible]. I was not – I was not pleased in every way, because I did hate to go that far. But, I was very interested in the whole thing, and when I was there, the children were going to be really glad to see me [inaudible]. Well, they weren't glad to see me at all. And – but, it did, I think – was a first encounter with a white person. And I was – I mean, on a personal basis.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: And I was called – when they got mad, I was called honky, cracker, and whitey, and I – my attitude towards them was-I said, "Now, I cannot help being white any more than you can help being black," and this kind of thing. And I got a volunteer to come and help me with the work, because I had a pretty heavy load of children – the discipline was very hard – very hard. And I would not . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Yes, I think that almost everybody stayed in the same [inaudible]. And anyway, I – whatever they did, I responded in a – in an attempt – I mean, I attempted to be patient and felt that I was, and that's the mistake [inaudible] when I was in school. And so, junior high school, I believe – maybe high school – children would come by our windows – Blacks – and just stick their heads in the window and that kind of thing. And some of the teachers had a lot of trouble with them at that time. I didn't. I would just go to the window and say, you know, "What do y'all want?" And they said, "We're protesting." And I said, "Well," you know, "tell us and we'll protest too." And so, they would just go on. But, they did give some people a hard time.

Finally, it just got really bad and my students were very frightened. They said that black panthers had been in their neighborhood and told their parents not to shop at the food center, I believe it was. And it was interesting to see that the black children were so upset, and they said that their mother said that they were going to shop wherever they wanted to, and [inaudible] at that time. They told me I'd better go get her, because they had [inaudible]. Well, anyway, I had complete cooperation with Mr. Cook, who was the assistant principal, and Mrs. Robinson, who was the principal. But, as I say, I had difficulty teaching because I had difficulty with the discipline. And the last day before school was let out, it was so bad that we- they let school out for two days until things calmed down. But, that day, they came and got me in school and told me that my father had died.

And so, when I came back, I was – I had been out several days – I guess a week, because I took the days that the public schools give you for a death in your immediate family, and then I was given two other days. And when I came back, I was – I was hurt and – I don't know. I came back with kind of a different attitude and so the first child who called me a honky after I came back, I said, "Do you want me to call you a nigger?" And the whole class just got as quiet as you've ever heard. And I said, "What's wrong?" You know, I said, "Nobody got quiet when you called me a honky. [inaudible] You know, I said, "I don't like being called honky anymore than you do nigger." So, I said, [inaudible]. And I leveled with them and I really think that looking back that they really had a sense before that I felt like I was better than they were, you know, because I kind of kept myself on a higher level. And so, once I really did just level with them and the parents had already told me I was being too soft. That's the black expression, as far as I know. The whites say easy. But, they said I was being too soft.

And so, I stopped being too soft, you know. Like, I had a child who would go – and this was one of the very bright children who – I've forgotten [inaudible] – not placed correctly [inaudible] was a smart child. But, he was trying – he would go and get the venetian blind cord and hold it. And

sometimes, he'd let it drop. And so, I had asked him to – you know, “Would you sit down and put the cord down.” And he would stand there and just smile at me. And I would have to get up out of my desk and walk over – or wherever I was – walk over and when I would get just about to him, then he'd let it go and smile. And then he would put it down.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: So, what I did – after my daddy had died – I saw him get it and so, I just walked over and just knocked the fire out of him, and he put it down and really seemed to respect my action, you know, I mean, much more than my fooling with him time after time after time. I just hit his hand, really, but I hit him as hard as I possibly could. And so, toward the end of – well, and the teachers' attitudes were interesting. And I guess what you would probably expect, most of them were middle-aged, and a few were young, but, for the most part, very resentful – terribly resentful of their plight. And I don't now what time of the year it was, but the principals were allowed to request one or two teachers back to their school, and my principal requested that I come back to Casey. And this caused further resentment with the teachers who wanted to go back to the school and weren't chosen to go back.

And I remember sitting at the table one night, and I told my family that I thought I really should stay because I was one of the few who really did accept the black children [inaudible] I probably shouldn't. And they said, “Well, it would just have to be a matter of which I preferred”, because I [inaudible] so much harder to get along with and my job was so much harder, you know, [inaudible]. So, I did take the transfer back and, of course, I'm within miles of the school. And I mean, time alone, it was so much easier. And it was the thing for me to do, for my own personal life, it would have been a sacrifice, and I wasn't that good [inaudible], you know.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: I'd think they'd find somebody else that's doing better?. But, so it is ridiculous?. I think [inaudible] sacrifice, had I done that?.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: So, I was brought back to Casey and . . .

KELLOGG: What was the teachers' reaction [inaudible]?

CLARKSON: I don't even remember. Actually, there was . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: there was real resentment among only about two of them that I [inaudible] that nobody agreed with me, as I say, it wasn't personal. But, you know, I don't know . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: I don't have any idea. I don't even know if they were aware that I was gone. I'm trying to think. Now, most of the students that I had had were already in private school [inaudible].

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Oh, yeah. Well, there was a bunch and I had only four white children – five children – in my class.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: The rest – the rest were black. And I don't remember the student situation. Anyway, there was not anybody who felt badly toward me, or if they did, it certainly didn't [inaudible]. I had found that, if you are really honest in your beliefs, and people respect you too, and once the bitterness was over, the two I'm talking about [inaudible]. I'm not aware of it and I'm really not bothered by it, you know. But, it was just a – I think really the feeling toward me at that time was really a feeling toward the whole situation and the fear of being – and see, these people had been reared to feel the way they did. I mean, this was not anything that – I think the prejudice toward these people is as bad as being prejudiced toward somebody who's black because they'd been reared that way, and I truly believe that had I not majored in Sociology and had I not [inaudible] fantastic teacher, and my family, I think, is pretty liberal for.

Well, in fact, I'm sure that – that my parents were, for some reason, much more liberal than – than many people in Mississippi. But, I also think that the prejudice of a lot of people was fear. I mean, I think a lot of Mississippians felt that so many things were wrong that went on with the Blacks, but were really afraid to express their opinion. So, I think integration freed many white people, as well as black people – freed them to express their opinions, and that kind of thing. And had I not gotten the, as I say, had I not gotten the education that I got and felt so strongly about, then I'm sure I would have been too confused, and not have the courage to really take a stand..

And it was not really too difficult for me to, you know. I mean, and my friends – I was surprised to hear several years ago that – that this couple I know had said that I was the most liberal person that they'd ever met. And

they are very conservative, but their feelings toward me is nothing but friendly because I think, as I say, people accept your opinion if you're honest, unless it involves them. And if it involves them – and that's what this situation did with integration [inaudible]. These teachers were terrified what it was going to do to their personal lives. And believe me, it, you know, did that.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Oh, it depended on the person. I . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: There – I don't know any. I can't generalize with you at all. I can – I can tell you that one teacher I talked with, who's now retired, and I guess she was 10 years older than I was, and she came from a rural area, really the same county that my daddy came from, and I believe that I can literally say that she hated integration [inaudible].

KELLOGG: Was this a personal feeling or was she just prejudiced against Blacks?

CLARKSON: Against Blacks [inaudible] and was unable to accept [inaudible] I don't know what anybody could expect, you know. She's been really that way for 55 years and what's she supposed to do – being thrown out there and start loving them all of a sudden? You know, there's no way that you can do away – in fact, I remember Dr. Horton, who was my teacher at Millsaps say, "Do not try to change anybody's mind over 40."

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: So, you see, the black children suffered with this, as well as the white teachers, you know. And this is why I say I think the Whites suffered [inaudible] – to a degree. And surely, it has to do with education. And there was another teacher I knew who really were the only two that I knew fairly well, and she [inaudible]. And I am – I will say this, I think that the teachers who were good teachers for white students – really good teachers – I think they would be good teachers for black children. The teachers who I thought were excellent teachers before integration, I still think they're good teachers [inaudible].

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Maybe it's because I think good teachers have to be good people, you know. And I think that – that a good teacher judges a child as an individual, regardless, [inaudible]. I think their teaching came first. You know, I think they look to these black children as students, and I think that their job as a

teacher superseded any theory they might have. And as soon as you can look at a child as an individual, that's the whole ballgame, you know, because you're not going to – you're not going to be prejudice if you judge a person on their individual merits, and I distrust anybody who says they love all black people, just as much as I do if they say they hate all black people, because neither one of them is true. You don't love all white people, you know, unless you're Christ. You're just not going to like everybody, no matter what caused that – that you should like the people. You should like everyone. You should accept it.

KELLOGG: Yeah, [inaudible].

CLARKSON: Accepting as a person, that's right.

KELLOGG: Right. [inaudible].

CLARKSON: Well, now you – I noticed one question that you had, and that was, I think, the difference in the situation now and the situation right after integration, and at Smith, I had totally Blacks, and when I came back to Casey, the Whites were in the minority, and the Blacks were pretty cruel – pretty rough on them. They were prejudice. And the white children had a difficult time, and I will have to say this – I would not have had my child in that situation, I don't believe [inaudible] very hard. It got better. I could not see any appreciable change until about four years ago. And when I got my first class that had started first grade [inaudible], I could see a real difference. We're a very small school, and I don't think any elementary school should be the size of Smith.

KELLOGG: What [inaudible]?

CLARKSON: Two hundred and something.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Between two hundred and [inaudible].

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Well, I think Smith had about [inaudible].

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: [inaudible] Tremendously. Okay, I think we had good black teachers at Casey and that was something that amazed me. I had expected – and I don't know why – I had no right to – I had expected all black teachers to be missionaries of some sort. I mean, I had expected them to be – to be

working so hard to bring the black child up to sort of superhuman. I don't know why I had thought that. But, anyway, I was amazed that some of the black teachers didn't care, you know, just as some of the white teachers don't care. So, I don't know why I thought that the Blacks [inaudible]

Anyway, I think we have a good, good staff at Casey School.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Well, we were too though.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Yeah. Right. That's what I thought. Of course, a lot of them did, but anyway, there was prejudice of the Blacks toward the Whites, and Casey has gotten more and more Whites. We don't have a – we still don't have as many Whites as we do Blacks. We have more Whites than we have had since integration, and I think it's – I think it's because it's a small school and [inaudible].

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: I don't know.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Well, I wish I did.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: I guess [inaudible]. Anyway, we have – okay, when we got enough Whites, then the Whites and Blacks were fairly even – not even, but for some reason, my room – I ended up with as many Whites as Blacks, and the first time I heard the Whites call the Blacks “niggers.” So, they felt – I suppose, they felt secure. So, it's just a matter of numbers as to who's willing to be prejudice toward, you know. So, anyway, the Whites became prejudice – I mean, began acting out toward the Blacks. And now, I realize that we had really – for two years, I had not noticed prejudice at all. And not too long ago, I heard one of the white children call a black “turkey,” so, I decided we had really arrived, you know.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: I have not heard anybody call anybody a honky or nigger, and that doesn't mean they haven't done it, but I'm just – there's a difference in what I hear.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: And the relationships are fine. I think that they evolved into letting the children come who were economically or educationally – if their parents had anywhere near similar educational backgrounds, then I think they might see some sort of social integration because we had a few who transferred in, and they seemed to do quite well together. But, [inaudible] are just poor little children. They had just rundown homes and their mothers are maids and one of my real liberal mothers said that she was so disappointed that her daughter had not brought any black children to her – invite any black children to her birthday party. And she has a maid, and I said, “Well, did you invite your maid? Have you invited her to any social functions that you’ve had?” And she said, “I see your point.” Now they have had black people in their home and are very liberal, but it’s not a matter of the color; it’s a matter of having any common ground at all. So, Casey can only go so far with it because if the – if the color were the only thing, then I think we’d have a chance . . .

## Part 2

CLARKSON: My name is Betty Clarkson. I graduated from Millsaps College in, I believe, 1947, and I majored in Sociology, and had an extremely good professor, and a liberal one who taught at Tougaloo as well as Millsaps, Dr. Horton. I had planned to get my master’s degree in sociology and go into social work when I decided – but decided to get married instead, and began teaching school. I taught school four years, then had children. I taught in private school and then began teaching at Casey School, I guess, 12 years ago, and that would be 1960 – ’67, about. I have my – of course, I went back and got my degree in education. I have a master’s degree from Mississippi College and I have my 30 hours beyond a master’s, which I got going to various schools, the majority of which was gotten at the University Center.

I’m teaching at Casey School, where I started teaching 12 years ago, and this teaching experience was interrupted once during the desegregation when I went to an all-black, very large school – Smith – G. N. Smith. And I said that I went because my name was drawn out of a hat, right?

Okay, I went in February, I believe February, and taught until the end of that year, and the principals were allowed to ask – I don’t know how many – teachers back, but one or two, or several, I don’t know. And my principal asked that I return to Casey, and I went back to Casey. When the desegregation law was put into action, it was decided that teachers would be desegregated, and the method to be used was for the names of the teachers going to a school of the opposite race would be drawn, and there was a waiting period.

I do not know why there was as long a waiting period as there was. I do not remember, but I do know that we cleaned out our desks and got our rooms in order, and did everything we could conceivably do, and there was still some time to spare. And so, the teachers sat in the lounge and talked a good bit, and tension got pretty high, and I felt differently – one other teacher and I felt very differently from the rest of the staff, and that was that this was something that if it should not be done, it certainly didn't matter, but it didn't seem fair, because we felt that nothing had been fair toward the Blacks since they've been in America.

So, we felt that the fact that it wasn't fair, it didn't make any difference, and that – while I questioned whether it was the right way to go about it, I certainly did not question the fact that it needed to be done. So, by the day that we were to get the mail and find out, I realized that if my name were not drawn that I might possibly be not thought well of at all. I had – I had made my point so clear that I think resentment was pretty high at that time. At any rate, I felt some relief that my name had been drawn, even though it was – I'm within a mile of Casey and I was quite a bit further from Smith, so it was – it was a harder thing. It made a difference.

When I got to Smith, I had the flu, so I did not go for about the first three or four days. The desk that I took over was such a mess that it had papers in it from 1949 May day. I had been made – well, I had been advised to get mine as clean as a whistle, and everybody else at Casey, and that was cleaned out. And when I got there, everything was stuffed with junk, which I had to clean out, or wanted to clean out.

I had thought that the children would be pleased to have a white teacher. I don't know why. I just simply thought they would, and they weren't excited about it at all. And I found all the children – I must have had a low – I found out later it was a low group of children – the lowest group possibly at Smith, anyway. They were all on a Stanine of one and were reading in the fourth grade [inaudible] text, and I mean they were all in that book. They called me honky and cracker and, I don't remember what else – other names – whitey, perhaps.

I had 33, and when I say they were all on a Stanine of one, that is all but the ones who were transferred from Johnson, and there were about three children, or four, who were transferred from Johnson, all who were very bright. So, for some reason, they were placed in my class. And one of those transferred from Johnson was a little girl who came from North Carolina and her father was in the army, and the children treated her very much as they did me. She was considered white, or different, for all practical purposes.

I don't want to make it sound like it was all bad because – oh, anyway, back to the little girl who was from North Carolina. She was treated pretty much as I was. She was definitely in the minority. Even though she was black, she spoke differently and she was – well, this is kind of hard to say, but she was almost white, even though she was black, if that makes any sense, which it doesn't.

I had discipline problems unlike any that I had had in my teaching experience, and when I talked to the parents, they used the expression that I was too soft on the children, which I, you know, meant too easy in my language. And – but, anyway, many of the children were very kind to me and very sweet to me and very accepting. In fact, most of them were. So, when I'm saying that I was called honky and whitey and cracker, and that kind of thing, this was – in fact, I think I remember counting one time just really how many were resentful, openly. And I don't remember, but say 10 of the 33, which made enough to make it difficult. And one thing I remember was that when I asked the children why they did something, I could not get an answer. I never once got an answer from the question, "Why did you do it?" And these were from the problem children and I'm not sure they knew what I meant really, by "Why?"

My daddy died while I was teaching at Smith and when I got back, I came back with a different attitude and I was not too soft on them anymore. I really let them have it, and when they called me honky, I asked them if they wanted me to call them nigger, and the class got terribly quiet. And I said, "What's the matter?" You know, I said, "I don't like to be called honky anymore than you like to be called nigger. So, let's all get quiet and be shocked when somebody calls me honky next time." That approach was very good and I think it was more honest than what I'd done before. I think I leveled with them and I think before – I think they really kind of sensed maybe that I was patronizing, you know, when I'd say, "I can't help it that I'm white anymore than you can help it that you're black" and that kind of thing.

So, there were some very hard times at Smith, very hard. And I believe that I'm honest in saying it was the hardest teaching, with one exception, and that was to come later at Casey, that I've ever had. But, I had – I made friends there. There were some black teachers who were very kind. The assistant principal there at that time was very kind and helpful. And, well, the principal was, you know, very nice. And so, I couldn't – I didn't feel that I had much success as far as teaching where children were concerned.

And I thought that – I had forgotten that, I believe, I had – I taught that at summer – in summer school – taught a math group – the lowest math group. And there were five, I believe, groups that we taught that summer, maybe less, but anyway, it seemed that the custom was that whoever the person

was who had the least seniority took the lowest group, and I got the lowest group and had the most children in it. Now, we hadn't operated that way at Casey, but that was the way things operated at Smith and I remember my time meant to them was that, "Well, if that's the way you want them to learn, I'll do the best I can." And I'll never know why, but that was a pleasant experience. The children were very well-behaved and seemed to enjoy the class, and I used tangible objects in teaching them, and I remember it an altogether pleasant experience.

Then the next year, I went back to Casey. Integration was in full-swing and the white flight had certainly taken place. I don't remember how many white children I had, but in a class of, say, 30, I had probably four, maybe five white children, maybe six – I don't know.

KELLOGG: Were they all going to private schools?

CLARKSON: Uh, huh, or what?

KELLOGG: or just dropped out of school or moved out of town...

CLARKSON: Oh, no.

KELLOGG: or their parents were making them stay at home, or . . .

CLARKSON: Oh, no, no. These were all upper-middle class and middle-class families, you know. They were not leaving their children at home, no. They went to a private school, and I don't imagine any of them went to the Council School – maybe a few. But, I doubt seriously that many at all did. So, the children who were there – the white children were in the minority. They were picked on. They were treated very badly, some more than others. And it was pretty bad for the white child because there was little the teacher could do.

I found that the more I defended a white child, the more they decided to – the Blacks decided to give them a bad time. [inaudible] against verbal abuse [inaudible]. And the only thing I can tell you right now is that each year, it got a little better and I don't know really what happened. But, the children who, I would say, I began seeing a definite difference was probably three years ago, and I saw the biggest difference when I got the class that had been at – had begun school at Casey who had started in the first grade. Now, that was the first year that I had a group of children where there were no Whites that they called the Blacks niggers. In other words, the Whites were asserting themselves. There were enough of them that they felt it was not half-and-half, and I don't think it is yet. I'm not dead sure. I think it may be 60/40.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: 60 black and 40 white. Then the next year and this year, I have seen almost no prejudice. You know, I'm just not – I don't see it. And I – I don't see the kind of integration that I think people with the big American dream would have because the Whites still – for the most part it was the Whites – the Blacks for the most part would eat together. But, the people they chose to integrate – whoever decided on the way they were to be integrated surely didn't care if it were going to work or not because they had sent black children from a poverty area to be integrated with the children who are in a middle to upper-middle class environment.

So, if the people were white who came from the same place, they wouldn't be integrated any better than the Blacks are, and I really believe this, because they have nothing in common – absolutely nothing except maybe something in sports and there are a few transfers. There are a few people from the Smith and Johnson area that transferred to Casey who are black and from the middle – middle negro, you know, middle-income bracket of black people, and I do see a much better sign of friendship and social – socialization between those from that group and the people at Casey so that I could see that if integration had happened in this way where they had made some attempt to match incomes – and I know that's impossible because there's so many more poor Blacks in Jackson than poor Whites.

But, it seems that I went through Smith too quickly. So, we're going to go back and recapture a little bit of it. The first day that I went back after my illness, I do remember the kindness and I wrote this in a diary that I kept at the time. I do remember how kind the children were to me and most of them continued to be the whole time. And I remember that I loved the way they said my name. They called me [Clauson] instead of Clarkson. It was really soft and, you know, sweet. And when we went up to the cafeteria, it was just huge, so unlike Casey, which is a small school and a small cafeteria, and I just saw a sea of black, and when I looked down to pay for my lunch and looked up again, I had no idea where any of my children were sitting and we're supposed to sit with our children and keep up with them, at least . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: and I had totally lost them and I remember a little girl came up to and said, "They's over there." And I have wondered since at – how she knew that was what I wanted – was my children, you know, if maybe some other teachers who had come the first day while I was sick had lost theirs too, but I've never known. Anyway, she showed me where they were. Now, I talked about what the children – the names that they called me, and I said I had the lowest group. I mentioned that I had three or four.

I don't really remember exactly how many were from Johnson, but they

were – every single one of them were much brighter and out of place in the room that I had. I do not know how that happened – why they were not put in one of the upper classes. But, they were bored. It was very hard for me to teach them and then teach the others at the same time and keep things really going smoothly. So, one of the children that – I suppose the brightest one from Johnson and he – I thought he was a very bright child – was bored and decided that he wouldn't read library books in his spare time, as I'd encouraged him to do. And he made it his business to aggravate me and it seemed that a way he had decided to do that was to go and hold the Venetian blind.

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: And I asked him to put the Venetian blind cord down, and he would look at me with kind of a challenging look, and I would say, "Would you please put the blind down and get your library book," or whatever he was supposed to do. And he wouldn't do it until I walked slowly over there, and he would let it go very slowly, just enough to aggravate me and take my time. He would look at me with a very challenging kind of look.

And so, when I called his mother about it – I don't know whether – not about the Venetian blind, but about his attitude. And it – that – it was much better for a while. She was at first very resentful when I called and I don't remember whether I brought this up at the last tape or not, but anyway, she was resentful, but after I talked to her, she was most cooperative. And anyway, he fell back into his same pattern and I realized it was not his mother's responsibility. And I believe it was after Daddy died that I really didn't care about following the things that I'd always used in teaching and my patience and reasoning with children – I didn't care, you know. I was depressed and sad about my daddy, and so he reached up with the Venetian blind after my daddy's funeral and I didn't say anything. I just went up and hit him just as hard as I could and he sort of whirled around. And he smiled and he never picked up the Venetian blind again, and had . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: and had no resentment. Well, he had gotten attention, and a lot of it, see, for almost a semester. I had been giving him just that. And the hitting I gave him really almost no attention because what I did was I hardly even looked at him. I just walked over and hit him, and he whirled, and I went back to my desk and didn't even look back. I think he gained respect, which he had not had. I think that was the difference. I think that I got his respect. I think as long as I had pussy-footed around with him, he just thought he'd do it just as long – he played my game just as long as I wanted to play it, you know.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: And I think we'd probably still be doing it if I'd put up with it, but once I really meant business, you know, he stopped.

There was very little communication . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: between any teachers, really. There was very little visiting and the black teachers were, without exception, kind to me. I never felt that they opened up with me. I felt that they wanted integration and I think it's obvious why they wanted integration . . .

KELLOGG: Why is that?

CLARKSON: Because the white schools had a jump on them education-wise. The white children scored higher on the test. I think that the white college is – the white college teachers were more prepared. I think they were ready to equalize the opportunities, and one thing I was disappointed was I thought – and this was stupid on my part and I even – I thought all the black teachers would be working their fingers to the bone to teach the black children. You know, I thought they would want them to get ahead so desperately. Well, they weren't. They weren't at all, just the same as all the white teachers weren't working their fingers to the bone to teach the white children. But, I had felt if I were black that I would work so desperately for them to learn, you know.

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: Now, whether I would have is something different, but I felt that I would. And – but, the – the black teachers were reluctant, I felt, to talk with me – to really level with me. And I have some – there are some black teachers who I feel close to and I am very fond of. And if I put them on a scale with the white teachers at Casey as individuals, which is [inaudible]. I am closer to a couple of white teachers, but then one of my black friends would rate next, and I don't think she leveled with me either when it comes to some things regarding race. And I think that – I think black people are much more bitter than white people are willing to recognize. I think white people think that everything is okay now, and it's not okay now. Black people are still bitter. And I think if I were black, I would be bitter – very bitter. So, . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: so, we have – so we have it to deal with and I think really all a person has to do to understand it is just to think of themselves as black for a while,

because it's still hard. We're – they're still a minority race and – and white people still think they're smarter and they're better than “black people” and I think black people sense that. So, you know, [inaudible]. And even when people say – and they don't say that, but when they feel – the difference is when students now say black children are dumber. Now, they see that there are exceptions. Now they see so-and-so is smart, and so-and-so does well, and so they're seeing individuals in the black culture who do well. And so, the – the only thing that's going to help is what my teacher at Millsaps told me a lot of years ago, and that is, “Judge each person on his individual merits,” and that's, you know, that's all . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: that's all you can do and that's all that will ever be done that will be successful in providing good – good race relations and good people relations. There's not [inaudible]. Just look at each one of them.

Back to present time. In the change between when integration first started and now, I had wanted to write a book, but, for many reasons, the book won't be written, but one of which was I don't have the patience to take notes or do tapes every day, and I have lost much of what was happening in the beginning. I do remember that I couldn't understand much that the black child said. I did take some notes one day on the playground and ran across it in my file, and I never hear it anymore. Now, I think that it's kind of sad that the black culture is – some of the black expressions are being lost. I really do, and they are at Casey. They're – I don't know how it is at any other school, but at Casey, this is true.

And there are a few that the Whites had taken from the Blacks, but much of it's lost. And I think a lot of progress has been made at Casey. It – it's a small school and everybody really seems to care. And the children seem to really feel a part of Casey. They care for it. There is prejudice, I'm sure, and – but, I see almost none on either part, and this happened since I talked to you the last time. But, I think this will give you an example of how the children in my room feel. One of my white boys got mad at one of my black boys, and guess what he called him? He said, “You turkey!” So, . . .

KELLOGG: Yeah.

CLARKSON: . . . this would have never happened. You know, it would have been . . .

KELLOGG: [inaudible]

CLARKSON: Yeah, some kind of a racial slur – surely not “turkey,” you know.

**END OF RECORDING**

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